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EPA begins testing at Stimson Lumber

Special to the Inter Lake

LIBBY — The Environmental Protection Agency has begun testing the Stimson Lumber mill for asbestos contamination and plans to be finished by Sept. 20.

Ambient air and dust samples are being collected at the finger jointer, the plywood plant, the log yard and the central maintenance building, the EPA's Duc Nguyen told the Libby Community Advisory Group.

Samples will be tested for the presence of asbestos-contaminated vermiculite and the results will be shared with Stimson before being released to the public, Nguyen said.

Nguyen briefed the CAG on the sta-

tus of other EPA operations around Libby. At the former W.R. Grace screening plant, the agency is hoping to get restoration work finished by the end of the year, he said.

Excavation on the nearby Kootenai Flyway property is scheduled to begin during the first week of October. Residents of an adjacent subdivision will not have to be relocated while the work proceeds, Nguyen said.

The EPA has received two bids for paving Rainy Creek Road, but is waiting to get more before moving ahead with the project, Nguyen said. The bids that came were unexpectedly high, "way above \$300,000" to pave 1.5 miles of road, Nguyen said.

Lincoln County Commissioner Rita

Windom requested a meeting of county, EPA and Forest Service officials to discuss the issue. The road is needed to provide access for a Forest Service timber sale, she said.

"That's wood for the mill and jobs for the community and can't be done until that road is fixed," she said.

The EPA also is working with Burlington Northern Santa Fe on the cleanup of its railway through Libby. The agency received a work plan from the railroad Sept. 9 and is reviewing it with the intention of getting the cleanup done this year, Nguyen said.

The construction of special cells for asbestos-contaminated material at the county landfill is about 80-percent complete, Nguyen said. Material from

residential cleanup projects will go to the landfill, while contaminated material from former Grace properties has been taken to the company's closed vermiculite mine.

Teams working for the EPA have visited more than 2,000 of an estimated 3,000 homes scheduled for screening for the presence of vermiculite. More than 700 of the homes visited have vermiculite only outdoors, while about 150 have vermiculite only indoors; another 200 have both indoor and outdoor vermiculite.

The EPA's goal is to have 50 to 60 homes cleaned up by the end of the year by four to six cleanup teams, Nguyen said. The majority of the restoration work following cleanup will be contracted locally, he said.